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American Lung Association
Influenza: Serious Problem for People with Asthma
F A C T S H E E T

Even though the National Asthma Education and Prevention Program (NAEPP) recommends that all people with persistent asthma receive an annual influenza vaccination, studies suggest that only 8.9% of all people with asthma do so.

Until now, some scientists have been concerned that the vaccine may actually induce asthma episodes in some patients.

A new study funded by the American Lung Association, which appears in the November 22 issue of *The New England Journal of Medicine*, found that the influenza vaccine is safe for both children and adults with asthma, regardless of the severity of their asthma.

If the flu vaccine rate among people with asthma increased to 50%, then 41% of flu-triggered asthma attacks would be prevented.

Influenza can be very dangerous for people with asthma. The influenza virus is associated with serious illness and even death. During influenza outbreaks, there tends to be an increase in pneumonia cases and a high rate of influenza hospitalizations.

Influenza accounts for 192 million days spent in bed, 70 million lost working days, and 346 million days of restricted-activity each year.

Illness and death associated with influenza are particularly high for people with "high-risk" conditions, such as adults and children with heart, kidney and lung conditions, including asthma. Hospitalization rates for such people increase two- to five-fold during major flu epidemics.

Viral respiratory infections, such as influenza, may cause asthma episodes in people of all ages. Viral infections are believed to be the cause of 80-85% of asthma episodes in children. In addition, influenza infection often makes people with asthma more susceptible to constriction of the airways and persistent decline in lung function.

For more information about asthma and influenza, contact your local American Lung Association at 1-800-LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872) or visit our web site at www.lungusa.org.